

ADDRESS
OF
HON. PHILANDER CHASE KNOX
AT A
PATRIOTIC MASS MEETING
IN
EXPOSITION MUSIC HALL
PITTSBURGH, PA.
MARCH 31st, 1917

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By Transfer
The White House.

ALLEN, LANE & SCOTT
PRINTERS
PHILADELPHIA

I am well satisfied that pending the delivery by the President to Congress of his message of information and recommendation, it is not judicious for me to advocate any particular line of action by him in a public meeting called to comment upon our duty as patriotic citizens in the present international situation.

These meetings are important and valuable as reflecting the sentiment and purpose of the people in the event of hostilities. I am convinced, however, that those who share some of the responsibilities of the President in determining our foreign policies should themselves refrain from active advocacy of any particular policy until after the field of discussion has been opened by the President, as he proposes to ^{do} immediately ~~do~~ in an address to Congress.

True to the record and traditions of the past when our country has been imperiled, this city and this commonwealth are among the first of all the cities and commonwealths of the Union to give assurances of devoted loyalty to the flag and pledges of wholehearted support to those charged with the responsibilities of maintaining the Government's rights and vindicating the Government's honor.

By no wrongful act of our own, we have been drawn to the rim of the vortex of war, that with whirlpool madness is wrecking the manhood, the resources and the civilization of mighty nations.

Seemingly secure in the sanctions that the world has so long conceded to peaceful neutral nations, we have pursued our avocations, conducted our commerce and bestowed our charity with no thought of being embroiled in the differences of other peoples

or restrained in the exercise of our undoubted neutral immunities.

But this was a fool's paradise, from which there has been a rude awakening. Our rights upon the high seas have been denied and defied. Our people have been wantonly murdered in cold blood and our ships and our flag have been ignominiously effaced from the common highway of mankind.

Within less than two years seventeen American ships have been sunk on the high seas by the torpedoes, shells or gunfire of German submarines. Besides this many foreign ships have met a similar fate, entailing a total loss of two hundred and twenty-five American lives and the lives of twenty-four children born of foreign parents on American soil.

On March 24, 1916, the French cross-channel passenger steamer "Sussex" was

sunk by a German submarine without warning. Several American citizens lost their lives. As a result the United States Government sent on the 18th of April a note to Germany declaring its intention of breaking off diplomatic relations unless Germany abandoned her present policy of sinking her passenger and freight ships. In that note we said:

"If it is still the purpose of the Imperial German Government to prosecute relentless and indiscriminate warfare against vessels of commerce by the use of submarines without regard to what the Government of the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity, the Government of the United States is at last forced to the conclusion that there is but one course it can pursue. Unless the

Imperial Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of submarine warfare against passenger and freight-carrying vessels, the Government of the United States can have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the German Empire altogether."

In reply to this declaration the Imperial German Government gave this Government the following assurance :

"The German Government is prepared to do its utmost to confine the operations of war for the rest of its duration to the fighting forces of the belligerents, thereby also insuring the freedom of the seas, a principle upon which the German Government believes, now as before, to be in agreement with the Government of the United States."

Yet notwithstanding this solemn protest and equally solemn pledge, on January 31, 1917, Germany sent notice of the withdrawal of her submarine pledges stating that

"Germany will meet the illegal measures of her enemies by forcibly preventing, after February 1, 1917, in a zone around Great Britain, France, Italy, and in the eastern Mediterranean all navigation, that of neutrals included, from and to England and from and to France, and that all ships met within the zone will be sunk."

Our answer to this was the dismissal of the German Ambassador February 3, 1917. Since this date a half-dozen or more American ships have been torpedoed and destroyed and many American lives lost.

These facts as I have said place us today upon the rim of the vortex of war and we await with breathless expectancy

the nation's decision. Whether we are to prosecute a merely defacto war of defense such as was employed against the French spoliators of our commerce in the early part of the last century; whether we shall seek to punish the aggressor and if so whether by an independent war or in full alliance with the enemies of Germany; whether the means we employ shall be men and women or money or ships or all combined; whatever the precise measures may be of offense or defense that will soon be adopted, there is one thing about which there can be no doubt, we should speedily prepare and the measure of that preparedness should be gauged by the maximum possibilities of the situation.

The United States has never engaged in a war of conquest. We have never unsheathed the sword except to protect and insure our existence, to defend the honor of our flag

or to vindicate the principles of human liberty. And while, in my judgment, as I have heretofore said, there is no consideration which does not demand our aloofness from participation in this present gigantic war, except that of some dire extremity, yet when, if ever, war becomes a necessity, upon an issue approved by the people, in order to keep secure our rights, independence or honor, we will face it with undivided loyalty and patriotism, consciously prepared to meet its well-nigh infinite cost in treasure and to sacrifice upon the altar of our national welfare the lives of our sturdiest and best sons.

War cannot be declared against or decreed to exist between the United States and any other nation except by the people of the United States speaking through their representatives in Congress. The reservation of this power to the people is specific in the

Constitution of the United States. This is intended to provide against the possibility of the country being plunged into war through the acts of executive officers and to insure that war is not declared except in compliance with the people's will. A war would be a hopeless undertaking, even though the result of a Congressional declaration, if not supported by the conscience and willing service of the public.

The precise question for the American people to solve today is whether such dire extremity exists as to warrant us declaring war against Germany, or that a state of war exists between the United States and Germany. We are not competent to decide so momentous a question unless we have the courage to take a fair view of the circumstances out of which it arises and be guided in our decision by all the facts and obligations of duty which bear upon the question directly and collaterally.

Upon the one hand Germany says her life depends upon her being able to starve her enemies, and for that reason she will destroy our ships seeking to pass through prohibited zones of the high seas.

We say we have the right to navigate the seas unrestrained and will do so without regard to Germany's alleged necessity. This raises the question as between our rights and Germany's necessities, and it is contended upon the one hand that if that is all there is to the contest, we are going far enough for the present when we arm our merchant ships and put them upon an equal footing for attack and defense. It is claimed that by so doing we not only do not surrender our rights upon the high seas but pursue them supported by similar force to that which has been brought to bear against them, and that such action not only saves our honor but bids fair to be effective in the enforce-

ment of our rights. It is probable if this question had arisen in an ordinary war between two powers contending for something of peculiar interest to themselves alone and not of vital consequence to the world, that the assertion and enforcement of our rights in the manner now employed in the danger zones of European waters would have been perfectly satisfactory to the American public. But is this all that is involved? Many Americans think not and regard this world war really a contest between the autocracy and democracy of Europe. The allies, they claim, are fighting for and the central powers against the one great and enduring principle of human government and guarantee of human liberty and happiness. If this is so what relation does the greatest of all of the democracies of the world sustain to the contest? Has its aloofness therefrom ever been justi-

fiable? Have we been justified in waiting until a technical condition of war has been brought about by the violation of our own national rights or should we have sensed the nature of the conflict from the beginning and thrown our weight upon the side of those who struggle for the maintenance of the institutions which we so much revere? In other words, should we regard the situation as presenting a crisis or an opportunity.

Believing, as I do, that the President's recommendation to the Congress will be that it should declare that the acts of Germany in attacking American ships and destroying American lives are acts of war in consequence of which we should either assume the defensive attitude of armed neutrality, or that they constitute such a grave offense against our rights that it demands a war of aggression to redress the wrongs we have sustained, I intend to support him in either

choice, but with the certainty that if he presently recommends the former that the latter must inevitably follow and that our instant duty is to prepare for the larger event.

I feel sure this larger event lies close upon us, unless the war in Europe should terminate through causes operating upon the people who are sustaining its grievous burdens.

It has been decreed from all time that ultimately men should govern themselves. The growth of democracy records the advancement made in intelligence and in the natural yearning for liberty.

The preposterous doctrine of the divine right of kings could not be propagated as an original proposition today in any nation of the world, not even where it is now blindly accepted by considerable numbers of people as an unchallenged ancient belief.

All civilizing forces, both from within and without any particular country, are operat-

ing for democracy. The old systems finally perish through some concrete act of folly or madness and the people then come into their own.

The crowning act of madness of autocracy is the present European war of ambition, and God grant that it shall be ended as it should be by the people themselves, crushing forever the system and the men who have been its beneficiaries.

What a glorious conclusion it would be if those who have endured the agonies and shed their blood in an unholy war should be the divinely selected instruments to effect an enduring victory of liberty and peace.

I deprecate now that which I publicly condemned immediately after the sinking of the Lusitania, and that is the disposition in some quarters to cast unjust suspicion upon the loyalty of those of our fellow-citizens who by birth or descent have been allied

in sentiment with the peoples of other lands. I do not for one moment believe that there are many who have voluntarily renounced their allegiance to other countries and sworn true faith and allegiance to the United States who were committing conscious acts of treachery and perjury.

The men and women of honor and truth, who have come to our shores and by their own acts became a part and parcel of our body politic, deliberately and voluntarily abandoned their native land and everything that goes with it. They came to us to take on new ties, form new associations and make new homes, to adopt new ideals and form new traditions. They came with courage and hope and upon the faith that from us and our institutions they and their posterity will secure justice, liberty and happiness. The exceptions will be exceedingly rare where it will be found that they fall short

of the full measure of patriotic duty and willing sacrifice in any conflict which their America may have with the country of their descent.

Whatever befalls our country, let us here reconsecrate ourselves in its service. Whether it may be on land or sea, in the factory or in the field, somewhere, somehow, we all may be useful. We can not all be conspicuous, but no man can foresee the far-reaching consequences of even the humblest act. The fate of armies has often depended upon the vigilance of a single sentinel upon a lonely post or the courage of an humble courier bearing vital orders.

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